



**The Partnership Effect:**  
Sharing the impact of Australia  
and Pacific partnerships

# From Policy Gaps to Classroom Gain:

## Yap State offers a model for scalable education reform in the Federated States of Micronesia

In Yap, one of the remote island states of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), schools are spread across vast ocean miles and teaching takes place in 4 local languages. Despite these challenges, significant change is taking root in the education sector.

What began as small, incremental steps to improve the quality and inclusiveness of primary education is now creating lasting impact – not through quick fixes or outside control, but through trust, local leadership, patience and the right kind of partnership. Australia's support through the Australia-Pacific Partnerships Platform (the Partnerships Platform) has made this possible.

At the centre of this quiet transformation was Jo-Anna

Crawford-Bryde, an Education Adviser with the Yap Department of Education. Working remotely and deployed through the Partnerships Platform, Jo helped spark a movement that is now changing lives, classrooms and education systems across FSM.



*Jo Anna (Jo)  
Crawford  
Bryde*

When Jo began her assignment in Yap in 2021, the Yap Department of Education was operating without an up-to-date strategic plan and was instead relying on a document that was more than 10 years old.

As a result, roles weren't clear, teams worked in silos, the policies and procedures manual had not been updated since the 1980s, and there were no systems in

place to track whether teaching was improving student learning. A policy was in place that forbid girls who became pregnant to continue their education, and early childhood education mostly involved informal play with no structured learning environment.

Fast forward 4 years, and the education story in Yap is very different. Every school now operates with a clear, tailored School Improvement Plan. Preschool is mandatory for all five-year-olds. The policy excluding pregnant girls has been scrapped. Teaching has become more inclusive and, for the first time, teachers and principals are being hired and evaluated using clear standards, thanks to a reform Jo helped embed with her Department of Education colleagues.

These changes were not the result of top-down mandates or one-off workshops. They were the result of strong relationships and genuine partnerships. Jo worked



side-by-side with department leaders, mentoring them, helping them clarify their roles and responsibilities, and simplifying overwhelming processes into bite-sized actions. Rather than delivering top-down plans, she empowered staff to create their own.

*She didn't tell us what to do. She helped us figure out how to do it ourselves. And now we can.*

**Sandy Keiji**

Yap's Curriculum Coordinator

When Jonathan Mathau, a Bridging the Gap Officer responsible for liaising between the Yap Department of Education and the National Department of Education, struggled to get schools accredited without a formal process, Jo stepped in. She co-developed a simplified, user-friendly school improvement template that principals could use, aligning it with national accreditation standards.

*Schools actually moved up a level because we made the process simple, something our department could understand and trust.*

**Jonathan Mathau**

Bridging the Gap Officer

In early childhood education, Jo's influence was game-changing. Yap moved from mixed-age, informal early childhood centres to structured, age-specific preschool programs. Children now learn in their own language up to Grade 2, with English introduced gradually. Classrooms

in pilot schools have whiteboards, teachers have access to new literacy and numeracy materials, and students are thriving. The National Minimum Competency Test is a nationwide test that measures student competency in literacy and numeracy against national education standards. The latest test results showed an approximate 5% increase in language and literacy results. The National Department of Education showcased Yap's classrooms online as a model for other states.

Importantly, Yap Department of Education staff have actively contributed to and can rightly own the changes that have resulted through their efforts. The curriculum team, which once relied on external facilitators, is running its own workshops. Senior leaders who previously focused on paperwork now focus on students. A principal who used to stay in his office now visits classrooms regularly to support teaching. The culture has shifted from a box-ticking focus to a shared sense of purpose, from confusion to clarity.

These changes in the Yap education sector were the result of a culture shift and access to what could be described as a 'critical friend'. Jo did not dictate what needed to be done, but she did give honest and constructive feedback. She respected local knowledge, navigated cultural realities with care, and focused on empowering others to lead.

*The team understands their roles, they feel accountable, and they know how their work connects to student learning.*

**Jo Crawford-Bryde**

Education Adviser with the Yap Department of Education

Because of this collaborative effort, Yap is now setting the standard for inclusive education, teacher standards, curriculum development and strategic planning in FSM. This is evidenced by the National Department of Education's adoption of the Yap Department of Education's standards as the basis for the national standards.

For donors, Pacific governments and anyone seeking to understand what effective development assistance looks like – Yap offers a blueprint. This blueprint includes: hiring people who listen; partnering with purpose; working with what's there and building from that foundation. If real change can happen in Yap, it can happen anywhere.



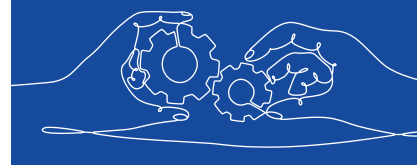
## **EOIO 2** **Enabling development services**

The Australian Government's development cooperation programs and partner governments are supported with efficient, effective, inclusive and responsive enabling services.



### **IO 2.1** **Enabling development services**

The Partnerships Platform, through its technical advisory activities, delivers timely, high-quality, strategic support to better meet shared policy priorities and national strategies.



The Australia-Pacific Partnerships Platform supports Australia and partner Pacific countries as they continue working together to build a stable, prosperous and secure region. The Australia-Pacific Partnerships Platform provides Nauru, Kiribati, Tuvalu, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and the Cook Islands with a suite of flexible, fit-for-purpose services that support development investments in governance, stability and resilience. The Australia-Pacific Partnerships Platform is supported by the Australian Government and managed by DT Global.